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ABSTRACT

This paper examines teachers' reactions to Graduation 2010, a district-wide public school program in Daviess County, Kentucky, that began with brain-based research and involvement from both school and community. The program proposed educational initiatives in eight areas: the arts, music, foreign language, thinking skills, family involvement, health/emotional health, reading/language development, and community involvement. Since the program's inception in 1997, the district's 12 elementary schools have been permitted to choose to implement any part or all of Graduation 2010. In 1999, researchers met on-site with teachers and asked them to answer open-ended questions about Graduation 2010, examining: the best aspects of the program, what was being overlooked, and how students had changed since the program began. Through qualitative analysis, teachers' answers were categorized into common themes across schools. This report presents preliminary findings regarding these themes. Common themes highlighted current problems encountered by teachers, children, schools, and the program; observed changes in schools and students; and the most crucial aspects (e.g., important things the school does for children). A variety of problems and positive and negative changes were cited. Most of these related to barriers to learning such as parenting, health/emotional health, and student behavior problems. Teaching problems related more to time constraints and instructional issues. (SM)

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# A Qualitative Analysis of Participating Teachers' Reactions to Graduation 2010*

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Abstract

This report studies teachers' reactions to Graduation 2010, a district wide public school program in Daviess County, Kentucky that had its beginnings in brain based research and involvement from both school and community. This program proposed educational initiatives in eight areas (strands): the Arts, Music, Foreign Language, Thinking Skills, Family Involvement, Health/Emotional Health, Reading/Language Development, and Community Involvement. Since the program's inception in the fall of 1997, the 12 elementary schools in the district have been permitted to choose to implement any part or all of the Graduation 2010 program. In the spring of 1999, three researchers met on-site with teachers and asked them to answer open-ended questions related to Graduation 2010. Questions included how important Graduation 2010 was to each school, what aspects were best, what was being overlooked, and how students had changed since the program began. Through qualitative analysis, teachers' answers to these questions were categorized into common themes across schools. This report presents preliminary findings regarding these themes.

A Qualitative Analysis of Participating Teachers' Reactions to Graduation 2010

Graduation 2010 is a district wide public school initiative that resulted from the cooperative planning effort of concerned educators and citizens of the Daviess County community in Daviess County, Kentucky. The group researched relevant information on brain development and studied ways to improve public school education for the students in the county. The primary goal of the project was to enhance the intellectual capacity of students. Eight committees were formed to further study one of eight areas and to develop implementation goals and guidelines. These eight areas were Music, the Arts, Foreign Language, Thinking Skills, Family Involvement, Health/Emotional Health, Reading/Language Development, and Community Involvement. In a report on first year implementation, Norman, O'Phelan, & Ecton (1998) reviewed empirical evidence used by each subcommittee.

The eight committees submitted short-range and long-range goals for Graduation 2010. For Music, goals included allocating space, training teachers, and establishing keyboard labs. For the Arts, goals included identifying an arts facilitator for each school and coordinating at least none arts experiences for kindergarten. For Foreign Language (Spanish), goals included training teachers in Spanish, developing videotapes, and beginning instruction in basic Spanish vocabulary. For Thinking Skills, teachers were trained in Talents Unlimited (Chissom & McLean, 1993) and were to begin implementing strategic games, such as chess, into the curriculum. For Family involvement (Parental Involvement), several strategies were recommended, including new student orientations and homework committees composed of teachers and parents. For Health/Emotional Health, goals included providing each school a nurse one day a week and developing fitness programs for students at each school. For Reading/Language Development (Reading), the goal was to implement the Kentucky Reads

grant which targets primary children who are at least one grade level behind in reading. For Community Involvement, the goal was to secure a corporate sponsor from the community for the kindergarten class. A final goal of the steering committee was to obtain a research team that would study both the level of implementation of the goals at each school and the overall effect of this program on student intellectual development and achievement. We are currently serving as this research team.

During the 1997-98 year, our research focus was on implementation (see Norman, O'Phelan, & Ecton, 1998). Principals were given an open ended survey half way through the first year on which they were asked to report on progress in each of the eight strands of the program. At the end of the first year, principals were asked to rate to what extent each of the goals for that year had been accomplished in their schools. Eleven of the twelve elementary principals responded to the survey. The results of this survey were presented at the 1998 MSERA meeting.

Toward the end of the 1998-99 year, we began collecting baseline data to measure student intellectual change as the program progresses. We individually tested those students who were part of a sample of 150 kindergarten students, and for whom the schools had received parental permission for testing. We were able to test 112 students.

A concern regarding implementation of this program was that the overall school climate might influence its effectiveness at each school. Thus, at about the same time, we conducted school culture audits for all 12 elementary schools. Teachers at all elementary schools were asked to participate by rating the extent to which each of 13 characteristics was present in the school and then, the importance of that characteristic. Schools were promised reports on the culture audits, and the evaluators visited each school and presented the results to the teachers and

principals. The audit results are not the focus of this paper, but all schools were found to be healthy with very few discrepancies between the importance and presence of key elements of a healthy school climate.

## Method

In the spring of 1999, we met on-site with the faculty of each school in an after school faculty meeting to present audit results and to lead teachers through group discussions of open-ended questions related to Graduation 2010. There were 9 questions:

1. Have you seen changes in this school? What are they?
2. Have you seen changes in children attending this school? What are they? What kinds of things?
3. The best thing that this school does to help children is . . . .
4. What problems are you having with your teaching?
5. What problems are children at the school having? If there were one thing that would enhance the performance of students at your school, what would it be?
6. What areas of emphasis do you think this school is overlooking?
7. To what extent do you see that Graduation 2010 has been important in this school?
8. What is the most crucial aspect of Graduation 2010?
9. What problems do you see with Graduation 2010?

Based on the number of teachers at each meeting, two to four discussion groups were formed to answer either questions #1-3 or questions #4-6. Groups then shared their answers with all teachers at the meeting. Any additional thoughts were added to the group comments. The visiting researcher read questions #7-9 to the whole faculty and took notes on faculty answers. A final question posed to the teachers was a rating (1-10) of the importance of Graduation 2010 to

their school.

It should be noted that, although all faculty recognized us as a team researching Graduation 2010, we purposely avoided reference to Graduation 2010 in the first six questions we posed to the faculty. Our hope was to discern whether themes related to this program would arise spontaneously or only when specific questions were asked.

We relied on Ethnograph to mark key categories of ideas within and across questions. Several judgment calls on our part were made regarding how to classify and code data. First, we created categories around the Graduation 2010 strands. Other categories developed as a pair of researchers worked together to analyze the teacher answers of a randomly chosen school. One of the pair then analyzed three other schools alone and added categories. Then, the other researcher worked alone to complete last eight schools working within the categories that were created. A few categories were added and problems with category definitions were noted. Finally, the original pair reviewed together all coded data and made mutually agreed on final changes or additions to coding. Our final coding resulted in 18 categories (see Table 1 for a listing and description of codes).

Another decision made at this time was whether to emphasize how frequently themes were mentioned or length of time devoted to discussing particular themes. This was also a judgement call because some themes were mentioned frequently but briefly whereas others were mentioned less often but when mentioned were discussed in some depth. This, our first attempt to make sense of the data, focuses on frequency.

## Results

The analysis of results will focus on listing all categories mentioned for each question along with their frequencies (see Table 2 for an overview). The highest ranking categories for

each questions will be discussed in addition to any categories directly related to Graduation 2010.

A recent shift in the thinking in the Daviess County administration is worth noting here. Although the administration acknowledges the importance of all strands of Graduation 2010, the strands have been divided into two groups: barriers (Parental Involvement, Health/Emotional Health, Reading, and Community Involvement) and enhancers (Music, the Arts, Spanish, and Thinking Skills). Whereas the barriers are being viewed as "givens" and resistant to change, most time and effort is being directed toward providing the enhancers to the schools. We will use this language, when appropriate, as we discuss each question.

Regarding question #1, changes in schools, answers were placed into 14 categories (in order of frequency): administrative issues (n=20), instructional issues (n=17), faculty issues (n=11), parental involvement (n=8), thinking skills (n=6), health/emotional health (n=5), the arts (n=5), Spanish (n=4), enrichment (n=4), student behavior problems (n=3), parenting skills (n=2), reading (n=2), services (n=2), and music (n=1). The three most frequent categories all centered around mainly positive changes that had occurred at the administrative and faculty level. Comments included improvement in leadership, more consistent and appropriate discipline measures, changes in faculty and administrative personnel, better faculty morale, changes in test scores (not all positive). Some problems noted included too much testing and difficulties with students which affect instruction. The highest category related to Graduation 2010, Parental Involvement, included more positive than negative comments. Some schools noted increases in parent involvement, but others noted decreases. Teacher discussion concerning health/emotional health was generally negative. Similarly, two comments pertaining to parenting skills were negative (i.e., parents lack these skills.). Other issues related to the Graduation 2010 strands,

Table 1: Categories of Teacher Comments (N=18) and Selected Examples Listed by Graduation 2010 Strands and then Alphabetically

| Category | Selected Examples |
|---|---|
| G2010 - Arts | Arts, Developed more programs in the areas of arts and humanities, Students have developed an appreciation of different art forms |
| G2010 - Community Involvement | Volunteers, Exposure to...community involvement (e.g., Lipton picnic), Better connections between communities and businesses with schools |
| G2010 - Health/Emotional Health | Students with severe needs, Peer mediation skills being taught, Nurse in school part-time, We're not taking care of emotional problems, Children are stressed and insecure about life |
| G2010 - Music | Music, New keyboard music lab, Lab has been a great thing |
| G2010 - Parental Involvement | Parental involvement activities are better planned, Parental support has decreased/increased, Less respect for teachers' professional opinion from parents, Parents more apathetic |
| G2010 - Reading | Reading, Accelerated reader, Star reading program |
| G2010 - Spanish | Spanish, Spanish curriculum implemented, Spanish culture, Foreign language, Lack of teacher training in Spanish |
| G2010 - Thinking Skills | Thinking skills, Chess, Talents Unlimited, Lack of teacher training in chess |
| Administrative Issues | Redistricting, Lack of consistent leadership, Discipline is more consistent, Departmentalization, More assemblies, More technology |
| Brain Development | Connections this is helping the brain to make, Developing growth of brain, Brain research/development |
| Enrichment | Enrichment, Exposure to new experiences, Outdoor classroom, More enrichment activities added to curriculum |
| Faculty Issues | Faculty placement, New faculty, Staffing, Groupings have changed, Teacher/student ratio, Spanish teacher, Need more personnel |
| Instructional Issues | Emphasis on testing, Test scores dropped, More hands on activities, Modification in instruction, Stronger motivation to read, Better writers |
| Parenting Skills | Less interaction between parent and child, More children raising themselves, Increased parent neglect, Poor hygiene, Family/homelife problems, (Teachers) parent those that don't get it at home |
| Services | Mental health behavioral specialist, Family resource center, Special needs...are being stressed earlier, Kids who need special services |
| Student Behavior Problems | More discipline problems, More disruptive and uncooperative, lack of social skills, Less respects toward adults, More anger and hostility |
| Time | Time, Too much paperwork, Too much to cover, Finding enough time, Problems take away from teaching time |
| Teacher Training | Staff development, Spanish training needed, Art training needed |

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Table 2: Number of Times Teacher Comments Categories Appear Per Question and Total

| Category | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Q5 | Q6 | Q7 | Q8 | Q9 | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| G2010 - Arts | 5 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 2 | 2 | 23 |
| G2010 - Community Involvement | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 7 |
| G2010 - Health/Emotional Health | 5 | 14 | 14 | 3 | 9 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 51 |
| G2010 - Music | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 4 | 0 | 15 |
| G2010 - Parental Involvement | 8 | 12 | 2 | 4 | 14 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 45 |
| G2010 - Reading | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| G2010 - Spanish | 4 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 11 | 22 |
| G2010 - Thinking Skills | 6 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 20 |
| Administrative Issues | 20 | 0 | 3 | 8 | 7 | 11 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 53 |
| Brain Development | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 4 |
| Enrichment | 4 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 9 | 7 | 0 | 26 |
| Faculty Issues | 11 | 0 | 9 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 38 |
| Instructional Issues | 17 | 12 | 15 | 10 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 69 |
| Parenting Skills | 2 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 24 |
| Services | 2 | 2 | 9 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 22 |
| Student Behavior Problems | 3 | 18 | 0 | 7 | 11 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 42 |
| Time | 0 | 0 | 0 | 22 | 0 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 14 | 43 |
| Teacher Training | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 8 | 9 |

Thinking Skills, Spanish, Reading, and the Arts, were mentioned in neutral terms as having been implemented.

Question #2 asked teachers about changes in children. Answers were placed in eight categories: student behavior problems (n=18), health/emotional health (n=14), parental involvement (n=12), instructional issues (n=12), parenting skills (n=4), services (n=2), the arts (n=2), and music (n=2). As the most frequent category indicates, the responses to this question were overwhelmingly negative and were related to the barrier strands. These responses are even mo . interesting in light of the neutrality of the question. Teachers cited all types of behavior problems including student anger, hostility, disrespect, and irresponsibility, and students with emotional and psychological problems. Many of these responses overlapped with comments about the poor physical and emotional health of children. Comments regarding parents followed a similar theme with laments from teachers about lack of parental involvement or about parents with poor parenting skills. Even instructional issues were discussed mainly in terms of how negative changes in students were affecting instruction. The few comments about the Graduation 2010 enhancer strands, Music and the Arts, were positive, but were overshadowed by the concerns teachers had about the health and welfare of their students.

Question #3 asked about the best thing the school does to help children. Answers were placed in 12 categories: instructional issues (n=15), health/emotional health (n =14), services (n=9), faculty issues (n=9), enrichment (n=5), thinking skills (n=3), the arts (n=3), administrative issues (n=3), parental involvement (n=2), Spanish (n=2), parenting skills (n=1), and reading (n=1). The most frequent category, instructional issues, centered around faculty attitudes and/or actions that they believed helped children. These included setting high expectations for all students, providing a quality education, and working with children at their own level. The

second and third categories overlapped in that teachers mentioned school services that addressed the emotional and physical health of children. These included counseling and health services the school provided as well as a general school atmosphere of acceptance, safety, and support. Once again, the majority of responses centered around topics related to the Graduation 2010 barrier strands. Several themes related to the enhancer strands were mentioned but only by a handful of schools.

For question #4, problems with teaching, answers were placed in 10 categories: time (n=22), instructional issues (n=10), administrative issues (n=8), student behavior problems (n=7), faculty issues (n=4), parental involvement (n=4), health/emotional health (n=3), parenting skills (n=2), services (n=1), and Spanish (n=1). Very few negative comments were specifically directed toward Graduation 2010 in answering this question. Instead, in the time category, teachers spoke in broader terms such as not having enough time to cover everything, needing more planning time, and dealing with more paperwork. Likewise, when discussing instructional and administrative issues, teachers mentioned various topics with no particular themes emerging. Teachers infrequently mentioned problems related to the Graduation 2010 barriers, Health/Emotional Health and Parental Involvement. In both cases, teachers thought these problems were becoming more frequent over the years. Only one enhancer, Spanish, received mention with one group of teachers requesting a full-time Spanish teacher.

Question #5 asked teacher about problems children were having. Answers were placed in eight categories: parenting skills (n=15), parental involvement (n=14), student behavior problems (n=11), health/emotional health (n=9), administrative issues (n=7), services (n=5), instructional issues (n=4), and faculty issues (n=4). Although this was not the same question as question #2, changes in children, it is interesting to note the similarity in responses. The most

frequent categories for both questions are nearly the same and the comments embodied in them are essentially equal, i.e., teachers voiced the same concerns about lack of parent involvement and parents without parenting skills, about student disrespect and misbehavior, about students with behavioral and emotional problems, and about how these issues affected instruction. Once again, responses centered around the barriers that detract from student success.

Regarding question #6, what the school is overlooking, answers were placed in 10 categories: administrative issues (n=11), time (n=5), faculty issues (n=4), parental involvement (n=4), instructional issues (n=3), student behavior problems (n=3), services (n=2), health/emotional health (n=2), enrichment (n=1), and community involvement (n=1). As can be seen, this question neither received the number of responses nor centered around particular themes that earlier questions did. Even the most frequently mentioned category, administrative issues was a mixture of faculty wishes including less paperwork, more time, better discipline policies, and more funding. An interesting note is that the Graduation 2010 barrier, Community Involvement, receives its first mention here and by only one teacher group.

Question #7 asked teachers about the importance of Graduation 2010 to their school. Answers were placed in 12 categories: the arts (n=9), enrichment (n=9), music (n=8), thinking skills (n=4), Spanish (n=4), instructional issues (n=3), time (n=2), health/emotional health (n=2), teacher training (n=1), faculty issues (n=1), community involvement (n=1), and services (n=1). Here the enhancers, the Arts, Music, Thinking Skills, and Spanish, come to the fore. Even the category, enrichment, consisted of teachers' positive comments about students' exposure to new experiences. Although teachers spoke no less enthusiastically about the removal of barriers, the fewer number of comments indicates that the barriers are not seen as central to the Graduation

2010 program itself. Furthermore, the barrier, Reading/Language Development, did not receive mention by any teacher group.

For question #8, the most crucial aspect of Graduation 2010, answers were placed in 12 categories: enrichment (n=7), community involvement (n=5), brain development (n=4), music (n=4), thinking skills (n=4), instructional issues (n=2), administrative issues (n=2), faculty issues (n=2), health/emotional health (n=2), the arts (n=2), parental involvement (n=1), and Spanish (n=1). Comments in the most frequent category, enrichment, centered around the importance of starting programs early and the benefits of early exposure to the components of Graduation 2010. Interestingly, receiving only one previous mention, Community Involvement ranked as the second most frequently mentioned crucial aspect. Brain development, not mentioned in earlier questions, but a central concept in the overall Graduation 2010 program, received some support as a crucial aspect. The enhancers were all mentioned but none rose to the top as the most often cited crucial aspect.

Question #9 concerned problems with Graduation 2010. Answers were placed in eight categories: time (n=14), Spanish (n=11), teacher training (n=8), thinking skills (n=3), faculty issues (n=3), instructional issues (n=3), the arts (n=2), and administrative issues (n=2). In the time category, teachers voiced the dual concerns of extra time being devoted to Graduation 2010 and lesser time and attention being devoted to basic instruction. The specific component receiving the most criticism was Spanish, with teachers voicing concerns about inadequate training and about the too fast pace of the Spanish lessons. The next most frequent category, teacher training, ties in with the concerns about Spanish. Some concerns were directed at the Graduation 2010 program in general or the chess (Thinking Skills) and Arts components, but half of the teacher training comments were specifically directed at Spanish. The comments in the less

frequent categories for the most part were iterations on themes mentioned in the time and training categories.

A final question posed to teachers at 10 of the 12 schools, was an overall rating of the importance of Graduation 2010 to their school. Ratings ranged from 10, very important, to 0, not important at all. Eight schools rated Graduation 2010 as 8 or higher in importance. One school rated the program as 7 if Spanish and chess were not included and 5 if they were. One school rated Graduation 2010 between 2 and 5 in importance.

## Conclusion

If the results of the nine questions are put into categories according to commonalities in the questions, the three categories that result are current problems, observed changes, and the most crucial aspects. The "current problems" category includes problems teachers are having (question #4), problems children are having (#5), problems with Graduation 2010 (#9), and what is being overlooked in the school (#6). While the answers to all these question were necessarily negative, answers having to do with teaching were mostly about time constraints, instructional issues, and some barriers. Those about children were all about barriers: parenting, health and welfare of children, behavior problems, etc. Some barriers were also mentioned in answers to question #6, what is the school overlooking, but time constraints and administrative issues were also mentioned. Specific problems with Graduation 2010 were about time constraints, teacher training, and three of the four enhancer strands, especially Spanish. Music was not mentioned as a problem.

The "observed changes" category includes changes in the school (question #1) and changes in children (#2). Answers to these questions could have been negative or positive, and the general tone of answers about the school were positive, but those about children were mostly

negative. Barriers and enhancers were all mentioned as changes in the school along with many comments about changes in administration, instruction, and faculty. Barriers, especially student behavior, parenting issues, and health and welfare of students were mentioned as changes in students. Enhancers, Music and the Arts, were also mentioned a few times for this question.

The "most crucial aspects" category includes the best thing the school does for children (question #3), the most crucial aspect of Graduation 2010 (#8), and the general importance of Graduation 2010 (#7). Answers to these questions were mostly positive. Reducing barriers such as the condition of health and welfare of children was mentioned along with providing services and instructional issues, and three of the four enhancer strands (the Arts, Spanish, and Thinking Skills) were mentioned as the best thing the school does. All four enhancer strands (including Music) were mentioned in answer to crucial aspects of Graduation 2010. They were all mentioned again, in greater frequencies, especially the Arts and Music, when teachers were asked about the importance of Graduation 2010. Enrichment was a common thread through this set of questions.

In conclusion, while there was a variety of problems cited and there were both positive and negative changes cited, most of these had to do with the barriers to learning such as parenting, health/emotional health, and student behavior problems. Teaching problems cited were more related to time constraints and instructional issues. On the other hand, discussion of changes in the schools and the most important aspects of service for students were generally positive overall and all enhancers strands of Graduation 2010 were mentioned in these discussions.

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